

By 1630, or even a little earlier, after the cattle of the Pilgrims began to increase certain of them were forced to seek pasturage elsewhere. Thus naturally they turned to lands adjacent to Plymouth in the north.

What is now Duxbury was most inviting as it was easily reached by water, a much easier route than through dense forests by Indian trails. Thus Myles Standish, John Alden and William Brewster and a few others had no difficulty in securing large grants of land in Duxbury for land that had to be cleared was not considered of any value until the trees had been cut and the stumps cared for.

At one time Plymouth was sadly diminished in numbers by the exodus of these prominent inhabitants and the lands were granted only under the promise that those settling in Duxbury and vicinity should return to the mother town at certain stated intervals in the Fall.

Yet with transportation as it was this was a hardship especially for the women and children. Permission was asked and reluctantly granted that they be allowed to occupy their lands throughout the year and that meant for these God fearing people a place to worship. Thus early the first church was established, although the exact date is somewhat doubtful. At least it is known that in 1632 these hardy settlers were "gathered" together under Elder William Brewster to worship God. Presumably in that year the first crude edifice was ^{built} ~~est-~~ ~~ablished~~ at what is now known as the Myles Standish Cemetery on Chestnut Street. For there must have been some edifice to be "gathered" into, The site was well chosen for it ^{was in sight of the Bay} ~~overlooked their old homes in~~ ~~Plymouth~~ and was equidistant from the homesteads of Standish and

Brewster on the east, Alden on the north and west and the other settlers.

In 1632 as Governor Bradford states in his history those who had thus gathered for worship on the other side of the bay called "Duxberie", "as grown to a competente number they sued to be dismist and become a body of themselves, and so they were dismist (about this time) though very unwillingly."

It was fortunate for the small band of settlers to have among them such a man as William Brewster, fully capable by nature and training to be their presiding elder, for such he was from 1632 when the church was "gathered" to 1637 when the first minister, Ralph Partridge, was installed.

Fish, on his invaluable map, shows the Old Meeting House Road which ran from the Kings Highway just north of Tarkiln past the northern end of the present Island Creek Pond, then southeast to this First Church. From the east there was a road around the marshy land to accommodate Brewster and Standish till it met the straight road running to what is now Hall's Corner and through Chestnut Street to the First Church.

We speak of these as roads but in reality they were merely rough trails cut through the virgin forest with no resemblance to roads as we know them today. In 1632 horses were few and reserved for heavy farm work rather than conveying people to church. Probably a few rode, perhaps with the good wife behind, but most probably walked, making slow progress over the trails but not complaining for such journeys were nothing compared to other hardships they had to endure. Just as there are no records of the building of the Church in 1632 so we have no discription as to its size or of what it was built. Probably it was small and built of logs, small because there were few to accommodate, of logs because such material was near at hand and adaptable to small crude structures.

The man who presided over this first congregation, William Brewster, was remarkable in more ways than one. He was undoubtedly the best educated of the Pilgrim group for he was graduated from Cambridge, England, and

was so well versed in the classics that when the Pilgrim band fled to Amsterdam and Leyden he taught English through the Latin to Dutch, Dane or German as either required it.

He was sixty years old when he reached Plymouth in the Mayflower and although not trained for manual labor did his part in that bitter first year during which so many perished. Afterwards he joined with Standish, Winslow, Alden, Howland, Soule and Sampson and built a home on the Duxbury side of the bay. His home was adjacent to that of his great friend, Myles Standish.

Bradford in his history tells us of Brewster's "grave and deliberate utterance; of his humble, modest and inoffensive demeanor; of his cheerful spirit, not dismayed by trial, and always using above the worst that could beset him; and of his tenderness, particularly for those who had been driven to extremities for which their life had not prepared them." (Winsor, Oration delivered at 250th anniversary of Duxbury, 1887.).

It is unfortunate that with the exception of Bradford's History there are almost no records of this time. We would like to know if Brewster taught the children in this crude first church, as presumably he did since the value of an education was thoroughly appreciated by these early settlers. At least we know that until 1714 when the first school was established the ministers taught in the original church and took into their homes youths to fit for college.

The first minister of this little church was Ralph Partridge, "a gracious man of great abilities, formerly a clergyman of the Church of England, a Cambridge scholar driven from the pulpit by Archbishop Laud. He served until his death in 1658, much honored and loved by all who conversed with him and faithful to his charge notwithstanding the paucity and poverty of his Flock." From the death of Partridge to the erection of the second Meeting House within three or four rods of the first church

in 1707 there were two ministers, Rev. John Holmes (1658-1675) and Rev. Ichabod Wiswall who served from 1676 until his death in 1720. "He was much lamented by his people and was laid in the old cemetery on Chestnut Street where his stone may be seen."

The lives led by these men were not exciting judged by present day standards. Lives of toil and devotion to duty amid many hardships. Their sermons have not come down to us but perhaps it is just as well for the discourses which were preserved are not particularly interesting or edifying. What they did and what they accomplished in forming the characters of those whom they served is a part of the history of this region.